

SANTA MARIA LAURENTANA

Old World Customs Perpetuated In The New World

V. F. Beliajus



Procession through the streets at night.

The pictures in this article were taken by Joe Simbal.

September 8, the day of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, coincides with the day set aside to commemorate the apparition of the Virgin in the village of Lauroto. In the church of St. Philip Benizi, located in the 900 block of Cambridge Ave., Chicago, there is a shrine to the Virgin of Lauroto, and the parish composed of Sicilians, celebrates a three day festival during the long week-end of Labor Day.

I asked the parishioners on the particulars of this celebration. According to them: "A picture of the Madonna and Child was found in a rubbish pile in the little town of Lauroto by a cripple. For rescuing this sacred picture from such an unsavory place, the cripple, through the ever effusive graciousness of the Virgin, was restored to complete health. Thereafter, the picture considered sacred and miraculous, and object of adoration, was duly enshrined and properly worshiped. Miracles, so they say, continue even to this day to those sufferers who invoke the goodness of Her Divinity."

On Saturday evening, the first day of the "Festa", the entire locality of St. Philip Benizi parish was breathed with a festive and carnival spirit. The streets were decorated with banners and wreaths and lighted with myriads of electric bulbs. A parade composed of a band ranks of parishioners bearing multi-colored lanterns, and a big float with a huge tower from which fire-works were shot passed through the streets of the neighborhood to announce the opening of the "Festa". On the following day, during the morning hours, all people attended Mass and received Holy Communion. About 2:30 in the afternoon, the Sacred Arc (Sacra Arca — an immense shrine of many heavy columns) was borne out to the front of the church. Between the columns there was a picture of Santa Maria Laurentana with the Infant in Her arm and a monk adoringly genuflecting to her. Upon the columns rested a dome, and from its apex ribbons streamed downward. Between the columns on the floor the shrine were flowers given by the worshipers. Many men dressed in red alb-like pieces and red bandanas tied about their heads, carried the heavy shrine throughout the parade. It took approximately 40 men, ten to a post, to lift this heavy shrine. Four men stood on the platform in front of the sacred image, while two children, dressed as angels, stood guard at the rear of the arc.



REAR VIEW OF THE ARC.

The two men on the platform did the lifting of a person to enable him to kiss the glass that covered the face of the Madonna; the function of the third was to wipe the spot before a new devotee was lifted to kiss; the fourth man was the official bell ringer. For the privilege of kissing the sacred image, money is offered by the worshippers. This money is pinned to the streamers exposed to the public. By the time the procession is completed and returned to its final repose, the streamers are weighed down by the currency. At certain intervals the bell rings. The forty bearers of the shrine prepared themselves to move forward when the bell rang the second time. Because of the heavy weight of the sacred arc, only several yards were covered before the shrine was set down. More children and their weighty parents were then lifted reverently to kiss the pane. In a quarter of an hour the shrine was again moved toward other waiting worshipers. Laymen in front of the shrine loudly proclaimed the need of the people to plead with Her Grace to seek Her intercession. A Sicilian stood in front of the arc and in a very loud voice recited a prayer; he was followed by another man who also prayed and urged the people to invoke the mercies of the Virgin.

For a half mile the shrine procession filed past. It was headed by a band followed by various church organizations which carried their banners and candles — five feet long — heavy and decorated. Most of the pilgrims walked barefoot. Within the procession men and women were seen bearing wax figures of a finger, a hand, a leg, a breast, an abdomen, a neck, a hand, or a baby. These figures were decorated with bows and additional money and were offered as ailing organs of the bearer or one of its family, or, as a hoped for baby. The procession was solemn and at certain intervals Litanies (sets of short prayers) were recited. The intonation retained a Mediterranean character.

About 10:00 in the evening the procession came to a stop at the intersection nearest the church. From the roof of one of the tallest buildings to another across the street, suspended from cables, were drawn a boy and a girl of about ten years of age, who were dressed as "angels" in flowing gowns and wings, they were probably the same "angels" who were the guard of honor in the rear of the Sacred Arc during the day's procession). The

angels were drawn from opposite directions until they reached the point above the Sacred Arc. The multitude became hushed and awed and an air of solemn anticipation prevailed. The men removed their hats while the women covered their hair with handkerchiefs. The "angels" hovered in the air with a slight nervousness which was eventually overcome. They recited invocations antiphonally. The final verse was recited by both. At the end of the recitation bags of confetti were released and strewn over the Sacred Arc and the public, and the children were drawn back.

This, by no means, ended the "Festa." The Sacred Arc did not reach its final destination until an hour later. Afterwards, revelry, street dancing and a colorful display of fire works took place.

Booths were erected throughout the neighborhood from which Italian delicacies, such as Canolli, various seeds, kernels, crabs, snails, lobsters, blue points, barbecued sausages, pizzeria, wine and drinks of all types were sold. The vendors did a thriving business. Thus, far from Sicily and Mount Etna, the island traditions were reenacted in far away Chicago with an atmosphere oblivious to American and new world surroundings.

FOLK DANCERS NOOK

MY FATHER AND MOTHER WERE IRISH

V. F. Beliajus

During the All State convention of the Farmers Union, which was held in Estes Park, Colorado, Chester Graham, noted folk dance leader instructed the conventioners in an American party game, which, tho simple, was rather cute. It is danced to the tune of THE BEAR CLIMBED OVER THE MOUNTAINS, often sung as WE WON'T GO HOME UNTIL MORNING. This melody is known practically to everyone and the words are easy to learn.

Formation: a circle with partners. Girl to boy's right. All join hands. During the first verse everybody skips to the left as he sings:

Oh — My father and mother were Irish
My father and mother were Irish
My father and mother were Irish
And I am Irish too.
And I am Irish too.
And I am Irish too.
My father and mother were Irish
And I am Irish too.

During the second verse, the chorus, sung to the same tune, the action will be as the words in the song indicate.

Oh — Right hand to your partner
Left hand to your neighbor
Right hand to another
And all promenade.
All promenade,
All promenade,
My father and mother were Irish
And I am Irish too.

Face partners and join right hands, pass own partner and join left hand with the next person (meanwhile releasing hands with partners), now join right hands with the third person and with this person enter into promenade position (as right hands are joined, girls turn to stand in front of boy's right hand; thus, they both face in a counter-clockwise direction; her left hand is joined

with his left). Now promenade forward until the end of the verse.

The above action is repeated to the following verses:

Oh — I stole a pack of potatoes
I stole a pack of potatoes
I stole a pack of potatoes
And they were Irish too
And they were Irish too
And they were Irish too
I stole a pack of potatoes
And they were Irish too.

Repeat the chorus verse right hands to your partner, etc. but replace the last two lines with

I stole a pack of potatoes
And they were Irish too.

Still a third verse may be added tho the action remains the same.

Oh — The bear climbed over the mountain
The bear climbed over the mountain
The bear climbed over the mountain
And I'll be climbing too
And I'll be climbing too
And I'll be climbing too
The bear climbed over the mountain
And I'll be climbing too.

One may even sing. I won't get home until morning,

DANISH GYMNASTS THRILL LARGE

TORONTO AUDIENCE

Helen Kramer

One of the most remarkable tumbling exhibitions in recent years was staged at Varsity Arena on Saturday, September 13th, when the Danish Gymnasts, or "The Flensted-Jensen Danish Gym Team" provided a large audience with a thrilling demonstration of advanced gymnastics, apparatus work and tumbling.

Officially sponsored in Toronto by the Toronto Board of Education and the Physical Education Department of the University of Toronto, this group of thirty-two young men and women from Denmark presented an exciting and breath-taking spectacle.

Erik Flensted-Jensen is the organizer and director of this young group of people, representing all walks of life. The men of the team were selected to meet the highest standards in preparation for this international tour and come from communities with such interesting names as Copenhagen, Ejby, Thisted, Moegeltønder, Aalborg and cities and towns in all parts of Denmark. The girls of the team were, like the men, selected on the basis of ability, achievement and character.

Miss Signe Bertelsen directs the girls' Team and Thorkild Tromholt-Madsen, Composer and Pianist looks after the musical end. Special mention should be given to Assistant Director, Mr. Niels Larsen Lysemose who took over in the absence of Mr. Erik Flensted-Jensen, and many times had the crowd chuckling at his Danish instructions to the group which sounded like "Eat!" "Op!" "Aya!" "Bleep!" similar to the current American songs, "Bloop, Bleep".

The male members of this group performed fundamental and advanced gymnastics. The Danish fundamental gymnastics involve a system of body-building and form-giving exercises for the men. The aim is to develop the entire body in full harmony, to provide strength, flexibility and coordination. This attained through the funda-